MARVEL
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1 of 5
DAVID • ALIXE • LIVESAY
1602
FANTASTICK FOUR
RATED T+
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PREVIOUSLY IN 1602

The year is 1602. James I is king of England, William Shakespeare is the foremost dramatist and a quartet of adventurers recently gained special abilities while sailing their ship, The Fantastick, through a mystical curtain of light. Sir Richard Reed can now stretch his body in amazing ways. His ladylove Susan Storm is now invisible. Susan's brother John can set his body aflame and fly through the air. Benjamin Grimm, captain of The Fantastick, gained rock-like skin and the strength of many men.

In a recent adventure, the four escaped from the dungeons of Reed's rival, Count Otto von Doom, known to many as Otto the Handsome. In the escape, von Doom's face was horribly scarred.

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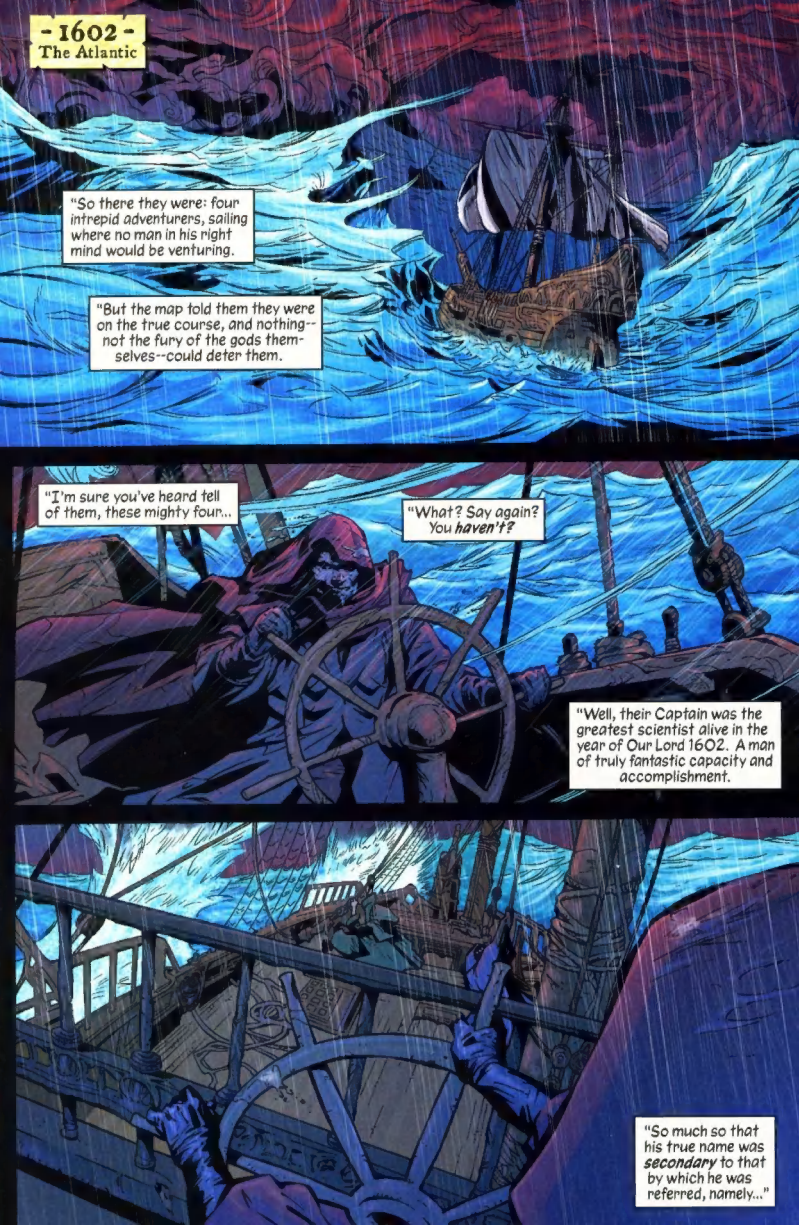

- 1602 -
The Atlantic
"So there they were: four intrepid adventurers, sailing where no man in his right mind would be venturing.
"But the map told them they were on the true course, and nothing--not the fury of the gods themselves--could deter them.
"I'm sure you've heard tell of them, these mighty four...
"What? Say again? You *haven't?*
"Well, their Captain was the greatest scientist alive in the year of Our Lord 1602. A man of truly fantastic capacity and accomplishment.
"So much so that his true name was ***secondary*** to that by which he was referred, namely..."

"...the Wizard.
"But there were limits to even the Wizard's experience. And what he was seeing now, here at the end of the world...
"...was enough to make even a strong man drop to his knees and sob for mercy."

"'Hold tight! Hold tight for your very *lives*, me hardies!' shouted the Wizard.
"The dragon's head came crashing down, barely missing the valiant vessel. Damned near swamped, she was, but the Wizard kept her steady.
"'Did you *see* that, Sandman?' the Wizard cried out. 'It would almost seem spawned from your *conjurings* rather than reality!'
"The albino known as Marko, the Sandman, actually smiled in the face of potential destruction. He'd not heard all the Captain's words, but enough to respond.
"'Would that it *were*, Captain! I'd dismiss it back to the land of illusion with a gesture, if I could.'"

"Suddenly he heard a cry of alarm from the crow's nest, where the master hunter called 'Trapster' was shouting to him.
"'What say you?' the Wizard called to him.
"But the furious gales wouldn't cooperate. All the Wizard Captain heard was 'World,' with the wind blowing the rest of the Trapster's words away.
"Then the Sandman began to shout. He'd caught a brief glimpse of that which awaited them on the other side of the crashing waves.
"The freakish--some would say 'inhuman'--woman called Medusa, with snakes for hair, had seen it as well.
"The desperate female braved the length of the deck to get to her lover's side. To warn him...
"...as if warning would have done the least bit of good.
"But make it to him she did, and she put her mouth right up to his ear and said...
"'The end of the world is nigh.'"

"Truer words, me hearties, had never been spoken.
"I'll have another drink, if ye don't mind."

Another drink? Now?
Gods above and below, I don't think there's another liquor in all Latveria to slake the thirst of one such as you.
Your tab is becoming larger than the tales you're spinning.
"Tales," good woman? It's true stories I'm telling here, and in my opinion...
...it's you who should be paying me for the fine entertainment I'm providing tonight.
Now refill, damn your eyes. I'm getting mighty parched.
Aye, pirate, I've heard your swearing that it's true and all. But I find it difficult to believe.
This "Most Frightful Four" ...we're seriously to believe they teetered on the edge of the world?
Not merely "teetered," my good fellow.
Went over. And lived to speak of it.
They went over.
And lived to speak of it.
And what, pray tell...did they speak of? Exactly?

A city.
A city.
A city... beyond the edge of the world?
As if he had not already pushed credulity to the breaking point and beyond...
It was a *city*, God strike me down if I lie.
A city like none other.
A city of advanced learning. Of science beyond reckoning or ken.
Truly, a city of miracles. Those who reside there...can accomplish anything they set their minds to. Nothing is beyond them.
Nothing.

Wha--?
And "nothing" is what I believe of this *mash* that you'd serve up as *meat*.
Now see here--
You see here.
Do you think us fools? Do you think we aren't up for your little game?
You're a *swindler*, is all. See a dozen like you every month.
In short order you're going to produce so-called "treasures" from this mysterious island, supposedly given you by this "wizard"...
...and claim you're willing to part with them for a "reasonable" price.
Wizards. Sand men. A woman with snakes for hair. Of all the--
AAAHHHHHH!!

Encore, monsieur, s'il vous plait.
Speak again of what you know with such authority to be *real*...and *not* real.
Entertain us with your *copious* knowledge.
In the meantime... be so kind as to remove the sword from my Captain's throat.
Witch-breed!
Mayhap. Mayhap not. Either way, I suggest you *heed* the words of Madame Medusa.
Did I forget to mention that merely looking directly into her eyes would transform you into stone?
It would be tragic, a man so young as you, to become a *chamber pot* for passing birds.
Well done.

Very well done. A shrewd decision, my young bravo...
...displaying wisdom beyond your years.
OOOOOOFFF!!
Be happy I held no dagger, or I'd have your guts for garters.
Now then...where was I?
It is not where you are... but where you will be.
Eh?
Ah! Ah! You're for it now, you are!
Whom do I have the pleasure of addressing...?

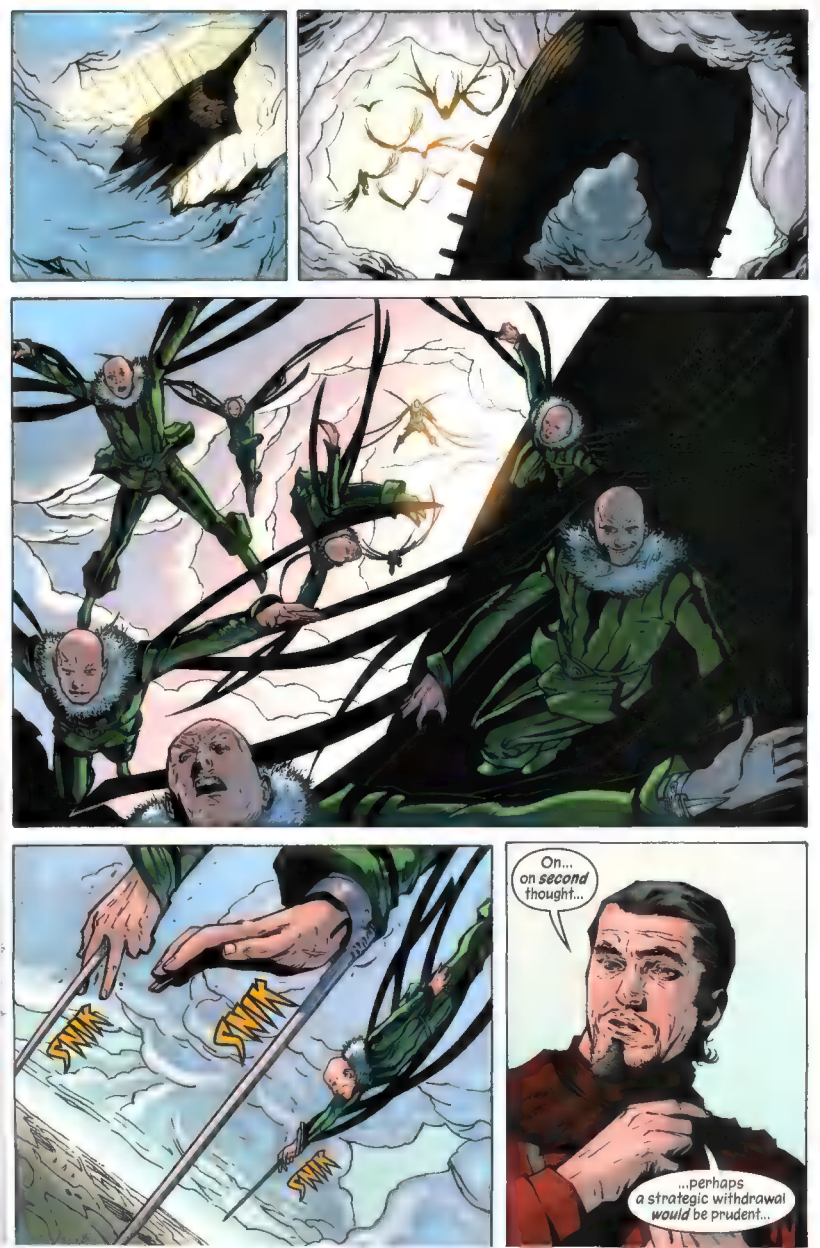
We are part of Count Otto Von Doom's personal guard.
Your claims have come to his attention, and he wishes to meet with you personally.
"Come to his attention?" We've barely been here an hour.
Nothing that transpires in Latveria does so without his knowledge.
My men are bringing your compatriots from upstairs.
Yes, they went to sleep early. They were feeling *fatigued*.
Tell me: what if we decline your master's "generous" invitation?
That is *not* an option.
And we suggest Madame Medusa keep her statue-inducing eyes to herself...
...lest she *become* that which she beholds.
In that case, what else can I say except...

Lay on, MacDuff! And damned be he who first cries, "Hold! Enow!"
It sounds positively gripping, Master Shakespeare!
A criticism, if you don't mind.
A critique from Your Majesty would honor me.
Macbeth doesn't come across as evil enough.
Evil, Your Majesty...?
Well, he was quite the tyrant, wasn't he. Boece's accounts are most clear on that score.
With respect, Majesty, no contemporary writer of Macbeth's time indicated that...
He's far too sympathetic, the way you're describing the story.
You know what the play needs, when you finally get down to writing it? Witches.
Witches... Your Majesty?
Yes. Two... no, make it three. Three is good.
Three... witches.

Consider your audience. You want to associate Macbeth with that which they fear and hate. Witches. The Witchbreed. It's perfect.
If...you *say* so, Majesty. Where would you suggest I, ah... *put* the witches?
Right in the beginning. Set the tone.
The King's insisting Will put witches into *Macbeth*.
Tell me you jest, "Mistress Ford."
Nay, my dear "Falstaff." Will's wiggling like a hooked worm, trying to cozy to the idea.
So it's ***witches*** now. What next? Giant ***spiders?***
I thought he was going to break down and *cry* when they made him stick ghosts into *Hamlet*.
People think having money [redacted] they know art.
When are we going to ***start*** already? This is--
Do ye... [redacted] something up there?
What... *is* that?
Naught that's ***good***, I [redacted] tell ye.

If you require reference, I've written an excellent tome on the subject. It's called *Dæmonologie*.
Good title.
I'll get you a copy. So...
...what play have you for us today? Better than that debacle last Candlemas, *Twelfth Night*, I should hope.
It's called *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Majesty. The Queen, God rest her soul, said she desired to see Falstaff fall in love. This is *my* humble endeavor in that regard.
A tragedy she didn't live to see it.
Yes, yes. A tragedy. That damnable assassin, Von Doom.
"Wives," eh? Does it *have* to be "wives"?
How about *tarts*? Tarts, strumpets...they're *far* merrier than wives, I can tell y--
What the *blazes*...?
Shakespeare, is this part of your show?
Is *what* part of the show, Majes--
--ty?

A...ship? Flying...?
What sort of--?
The *Witchbreed!* This has to be the work of the Witchbreed! Mark my words!
That *ghost ship* has the stink of sorcery all over it!
Oh, aye, it's having a *stink*, I'm thinking...
...but it's not the stuff of witchery.
This has the stench of a far more *mortal*, more *evil* bastard. Yer highness, I suggest we get ye the H[illegible] out of here...
James the First of England, flee in the face of menace? At the suggestion of an actor? When does one such as *I* take advice from an *actor?*
I will not retreat from some far-off apparition...
What the bloody hell are THEY?!?


SNIIK
SNIIK
SNIIK
On... on second thought...
...perhaps a strategic withdrawal would be prudent...

Get him *out* of here!
I'll hold them off!
Wha--?
Send yer master my *regards*, ye bastards.
And tell him I'll be seeing him in *Hell!*
Who the devil is *that?*
Who *cares?* *No one* ill-treats the minions of Doom!

Do I LOOK like "no one" to ye?
It's Grimm! Grimm of the Fantastick Four!
Glory be to any who bring his loathsome head as a trophy to our master!
Aye, come and seek yer glory! It'll be the same as yer death, and so all the same to me!

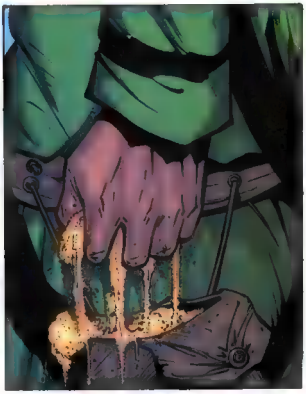
Tragic luck, ye blackguards have! To try and kidnap the King...

...when the acting troupe I'd joined was performing for 'im!
Rock-skinned buffoon!

Who said we came for the King?

AHHHHHHHH!!!

Order him returned safely! Now! Or it's yer life in exchange!



ARRUHHHHH!!
Your rock skin doesn't protect your eyes, eh?
Go! Go! Back to the ship!
I'll get ye, ye monsters! Tell yer master, this is *not* over! Not by *a far* piece!
I'll track ye down if I have to follow ye to the ends of the Earth!
Please! Let me *go!*
I mean...I mean *release* me... no! *Don't!* I--
The wordsmith doesn't seem to know what words to use.
Please don't bring me to that ship of ghosts! I'll lose my *soul!* I--
"Ghosts"? Superstitious fool. You've read too many of your own plays!
Then wha--?

Greetings, Master Playwright. I am your Captain...
...Natasha Romanova.
I am a great enthusiast of your writings.
You... you know my writings...?
Don't be modest. Granted, the Count considered Cervantes, but liberating him from prison would have been such a chore. And your body of work speaks for itself.
"Considered Cervantes"? For what?
Why, to chronicle Otto Von Doom's great endeavor, of course.
The Count is about to embark on an epic adventure. And he felt he required someone to record the quest... dramatize it...
So that future generations could thrill to his theatrical exploits.
He seeks immortality, you see. He deserves it.
And you, accompanying him on his quest, will help ensure that he obtains it.
But what if I die in the course of this quest? Then the play never gets written. Isn't that possible?
Distinctly possible, my dear Shakespeare...
...but those are the fortunes of the business you call "show."
Set course for Latveria! Take us home!

Ohhhh dear.
Reed! Reed, darling. We've just received a missive from Lord Baxter. He says he doesn't wish to harass us... but our rent on this lovely building is past due.
That may well be, my dear Susan. But it may well have to wait.
Wait? For what?
Well, lest my eyes deceive me... Otto Von Doom has embarked upon some new villainy, and we may have to attend to it.
"We?" Reed, no, you promised...
But I could not have anticipated--
You could and, I'll warrant, did, but still you promised. It's not merely us to consider anymore...
...but our child.
Yes. Of course, you're... quite right. Quite right.
We'll do...nothing. As you say. The world will simply have to survive... without the Fantastick Four.
To Be Continued...

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